



The U.S. Fire Service in Y2K Community Contingency & Mutual Aid

Mutual Aid During Y2K Taking On a Different Look

The traditional mutual aid model familiar to fire departments will disappear if Y2K-related disruptions occur at the turn of the year - or beyond. In the traditional mutual aid model, whenever an incident occurred in a community overwhelming the available resources, aid from neighboring jurisdictions was summoned to help mitigate that event.

Y2K promises to be different, and here's why. The 'normal' emergency that fire service organizations typically respond to are *localized* events: a larger-than-normal structure fire, a mass-casualty incident resulting from a multiple vehicle pileup on the Interstate, or a hazardous materials response produced when a railroad car full of chemicals overturns. These types of incidents normally affect only one community at a time and resources are available from neighboring towns.

Y2K-related events, on the other hand, could be *widespread* occurrences, affecting many communities, regions, and states *simultaneously*. For example, if an electrical utility within a region suffers Y2K-related problems, the power failure is not likely to affect just one community; it potentially will involve each community receiving electricity from that utility. Ditto for disruptions in telecommunications and water supply. Given that scenario, it would be wise to assume that nearby fire departments will be busy handling their own calls related to loss of critical infrastructures and therefore unable to provide the mutual-aid you might normally depend upon.

Instead of depending upon mutual-aid from neighboring departments, fire organizations should make every attempt to engage mutual-aid from departments *within* their community: public works, parks and recreation, and police are just a few examples. Don't forget about resources from the private sector. The key question must be "what resources exist within our community that could benefit our citizens in the event of an emergency"?

The process of developing these 'intra-community mutual aid' agreements must begin now. Elizabeth Dole, past

President of the American Red Cross tells us, "The midst of a disaster is the poorest possible time to establish new relationships and to introduce ourselves to new organizations. When you have taken the time to build rapport, then you can make a call at 2 a.m., when the river's rising and expect to launch a well-planned, smoothly conducted response." //

Snapshot of Fire Department Readiness

At the August conference of the International Association of Fire Chiefs in Kansas City, a "snapshot" readiness survey was conducted. The purpose of the survey was to provide an update to assessments conducted earlier in the year.

USFA received 352 fire department responses representing 42 states. 85% said they are ready as of August 30, 1999. An additional 11% said they will be ready before January 1, 2000. This means that a total of 96% of the responding fire departments expect to be ready before the New Year. In addition, 80% indicate that they have contingency plans in place. Compared to the sample conducted earlier this year in cooperation with the National Association of State Fire Marshals, these new figures indicate a slightly improved situation. A higher percentage of departments are optimistic about being ready in time and the percentage that have back-up plans in place has jumped 30%.

While only 4% indicate that they will not be ready AND they do not have contingency plans, this should still be a concern to those communities. Contingency planning is a must. //

USFA Y2K INFORMATION OFFICE

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THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE COMPACT

Mutual Aid Simplified...

Your organization has a disaster plan, contingency plans with other community agencies, and your providers have exercised and tested the plans with mutual aid sources.

Is your state fully prepared to adjunct your efforts if local and state resources are exhausted?

Twenty-seven states and Puerto Rico have the advantages of The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) member support. EMAC is an interstate mutual aid agreement, which supplements state, local and federal response during *natural and man-made disasters*. While states are capable of managing most emergencies, there are times when disasters exceed state and local resources and therefore require additional assistance. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other regional and national organizations endorse EMAC.

Congress approved EMAC in 1996, as required by the Constitution. Other than the outdated Civil Defense Compact, EMAC is the only all-hazards emergency management compact to receive Congressional approval. The only requirement for state membership in EMAC is for a state's legislature to ratify the language of the compact. This provides a legal framework to facilitate assistance and reimbursement. EMAC has an established implementation plan which directs member states in standard operating procedures for requesting and providing assistance.

FEMA has assured states that accepting interstate aid will not reduce federal disaster assistance. In a letter to the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA),

dated February 1996, FEMA Director James Lee Witt wrote: "...in making an assessment of whether or not state and local capabilities have been exceeded, the review by FEMA will be made of the requesting state's capabilities. The requesting states ability to secure resources from other states will not be a factor in the review of disaster declarations requests..."

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***James Lee Witt
FEMA Director***

NEMA provides administrative support for EMAC. Visit the web site below to see if your state is an EMAC member. ✎

<http://www.nemaweb.org>

select EMAC link

Contact NEMA at: (606) 244-8112

EMAC MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- **Supplements federal assistance**
- **Replaces federal assistance when not available or ineligible**
- **Does NOT reduce federal disaster assistance**
- **Cost effectiveness**
- **Established S.O.P.**
- **Rapid mobilization of resources**
- **Expertise of member states**
- **Guaranteed reimbursement for providing eligible assistance**

The President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion "Community Conversations"

People are looking for straight talk about the Y2K readiness of their local communities. The Council launched a nationwide program to bring citizens together with local business, government leaders, critical utility, and service providers dubbed "Community Conversations". The free "tool kit" is helping private sector business and organizations such as hospitals, emergency management agencies, universities, metro councils, Governor's Coalitions, and community Y2K groups plan their public event. This is an excellent opportunity for the fire service to partner with other community groups. Comments from agency representatives hosting "Conversations" in August and September, reveal that the public, generally, was confident in the ability of their local fire and EMS organizations to provide service during Y2K. Citizens noted that they often see community emergency service providers demonstrate their capabilities and flexibility in adverse times, such as during blizzards or flood disasters. The majority of concerns and questions were directed at utilities, water, and finance sectors. One State Council broadcast the program over their State educational TV network, receiving an unprecedented number of calls for a call-in topic format. The "tool kit" can be ordered through the Council's Y2K Information line at **1-888-USA-4-Y2K**. Visit the Council web site at www.y2k.gov/